

Global Opportunities Fund Framework – a Chance for Romania’s Business Training

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Abstract

Coventry University Enterprises (CUE) has a particular interest in developing relationships with business support organisations in the EU pre-accession states. Romania has been the focus of CUE attention for the past three years. Within EU Member States the two key sectors involved in economic regeneration are the business sector and the Higher Education Sector. Across the EU, Higher Education institutions are a key driver not only in the areas of education and training but also in innovation and technology as it relates to business development. The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) of the British Government manages Global Opportunities Fund and a set amount is allocated for suitable approved projects in Romania. Coventry University Enterprises (CUE) and the Confederation of West Midlands Chambers of Commerce (CWMCC) have together formulated a project and made a bid for funding within GOF (Global Opportunities Fund). The project’s title was: “Building capacity within South –Muntenia business support organisations for the sustained development of their SME community”. Within the project a number of workshops have been delivered for the University of Petroleum and Gas (UPG) from Ploiesti and for Prahova Commerce Chamber.

Key words: *project, Global Opportunities Fund, EU Framework structural funds, workshop*

Background

The objective of the GOF project is to assist the development of two key regional sectoral networks (Higher Education and Business Development) in support of local authorities in the implementation of a regional programme up to and after accession of Romania within EU. The project was set up and started by Tony Gunn, as a Specialist Business Development Manager in Policy & Trade Division, Coventry University Enterprises, the TechnoCentre.

If we take a look only at the Higher Education domain, according to Tony Gunn’s words, the programme between universities covered many important aspects such as: entrepreneurial awareness, university support for new business, innovation and also EU Framework 6 & 7 programmes (FP6 and FP7 EU schemes).

On the other hand, analysing Tony’s opinions expressed in the first workshop organised at UPG, it is important here to point out the key aims of the project:

- to act as a catalyst for Chambers, Universities and the business community to work in partnership for the development of the regional economy;
- to form the basis of future high-value, commercially dynamic projects;
- a continually improving training programme will enable Partners to assess and meet the changing needs of their environment;
- to ensure that Romanian Partners become independent of project support at the closure of this project;
- a long-term relationship for joint bids to EU funded trans-national projects.

The primary objective of the GOF project was to essentially develop the support offered to SMEs in the South Muntenian region of Romania, and then beyond.

It was instigated by an understanding that the UK Confederation of Chambers would work with the South Muntenian Confederation in this regard and that the University to University link would develop programmes to expand Chamber delivery themes and also offer direct access to SMEs in areas such as R&D and Market Research.

Essentially, the project focused on building the capacity within the delivery sector (Chambers) and the academic sector (Universities).

The project commenced in April 2006 and was concluded in August 2007. The overall assessment of the project was viewed to be successful by all parties involved.

Romanian partners expressed a view that the GOF programme had delivered a varied and interesting programme comprising 12 workshops from Coventry University(5) and Confederation of West Midlands Chambers (7).

Maybe it is important to mention here the main themes and subjects that were presented and also discussed concerning *University to University Modules*:

1. Entrepreneurial Awareness

- Collaboration between businesses and universities
Why is this of interest? What are the drivers? What are the barriers?
Structure, Knowledge transfer, Recommendations
- What makes a company successful?
Power/Interest matrix, strategic management, winning companies.
Empowerment, Partnerships
- Delivering a Concept
Analysis, research, promotion. An Idea to a Project.

2. Innovation

- Promoting innovation
Definition, types, need, be provocative!
- Developing an innovation culture
Principles, creativity v innovation, inhibitors, the GENIUS Code
- Planning innovation
Groundwork, market and business segmentation, writing a plan

3. Support for New Businesses

- To begin a new business
Aspects, SWOT analysis, legalities, difficulties, differentiation
- Finance
Sourcing, how much, what for? Cash flow, challenging a plan
- Management
Information systems, Accounts, marketing, planning, managing growth, team-building
- Marketing & Selling
Process, basic assumptions, growth/share matrix, forces and strategies, market surveys, selling

- Budgeting

Defining objectives, planning, key messages, budgetary control, budgeting techniques

4. Capacity Building

- Innovation Centre development

Key issues, the market, business incubation, business growth, Ownership, centre specification

- The model of science park development

Features, variables, examples

- Some considerations

Funding, property management, legalities, exit strategy

5. EU Framework 7

- The new framework

Budgetary headings, cohesion, growth, employment, main programmes

- Its policy and context

How to become involved, working within an EU Project, preparation and process of the project proposal

- Programme projects

Where to find partners?, multicultural implications, record keeping. The evaluation process and communication with the Commissioners.

The project content delivered through workshops had enabled the UK partners to provide both their knowledge and an experience base to the Romanian partners with informative workshops, best practice models operative in the UK and how these model processes could be used/implemented into the Romanian business models - with the progression of time.

The strength of the GOF project was seen due to its educational value to the Romanian partners and to the interaction of workshops that had enabled relationships to be formed across the business support networks in both Countries that attended the programme.

Besides the relationships formed between the UK and Romanian organisations, the project also brought synergy by strengthening the relationships particularly between UPG and Prahova Chamber and by reaching the aim of future opportunity to work together on mutually beneficial commercial programme(s).

Lessons Learned

The feedbacks on the lessons learned from the project were:

- Future delivery of the workshops should seek to minimise the widespread number and duration of the delivery workshops undertaken in favour of a somewhat more intense form of delivery focussed on delivering values.
- Project delivery focus on numerous delivery modules had a negative impact on overhead costs in the project;
- The University and Chamber partners in Romania had no finance provisions in the project to support workshops with respect to effective marketing to attract end users attendance and costs of hiring support facilities such as room hire and refreshments;
- The University and Chamber partners felt that any future programme should consider some time allocation condition for Romanian Partners in the UK to ascertain a more practical experience of the work activities as currently rolled out in Coventry Technology Park and Coventry Chamber to mutual benefit;
- The programme was realised by the Presidents and University partners and for the future, the Group commented that a fuller consultation at the executive level should be an integral and comprehensive approach to add overall mutual value to all partners.

Future Collaborations

Future collaborations between participating partners as a result of this programme had been made easier due to the developed relationships. Romanian partners welcomed the need for continued collaboration on selected programmes. Consensus was reached that the Romanian partners should investigate EU Framework structural funds to support future programmes in which Coventry University and Chambers could share their knowledge base.

Two specific *projects* were highlighted:

1. The Soft Landing Programme run by Coventry University Enterprises Ltd that could help investment related activities from overseas companies into Romania to be supported;
2. The establishment of Business Incubator facility at the UPG with guidance from Coventry University Enterprises Ltd.

To this purpose, UPG would apply for EU structural fund support with an invitation to Coventry University to be a participating advisory partner.

On fulfilling the first project (1), there was a need for Coventry University to pursue the model process with UPG and Prahova Chamber. Both Romanian partners viewed this as a favourable outcome. On fulfilling the second project (2), UPG will have to liaise with Coventry University as a partner. Coventry University could provide the knowledge base with UPG, accessing the EU structural funding support.

This was verified by Bucharest Chamber that supported a view for continuation of projects, funding being essentially supported by the Romanian activity vis à vis EU frameworks and UK partners providing their expertise and know how. Finally, Chamber partners agreed to compile a list of key contacts in their respective confederation/association and keep the other informed about any opportunities for partnering in future projects.

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Rezumat

Coventry University Enterprises (CUE) manifestă un interes deosebit în dezvoltarea relațiilor cu organizațiile care sprijină afacerile, în statele care se pregătesc pentru aderarea la UE. România s-a situat în atenția CUE în ultimii trei ani. În cadrul țărilor membre ale UE, cele două sectoare-cheie implicate în revigorarea economiei sunt reprezentate de sectorul afacerilor, respectiv de sectorul învățământului universitar. În UE, instituțiile de învățământ superior reprezintă un factor esențial nu numai în ariile educației și instruirii, ci și în inovare și tehnologie - domenii esențiale pentru dezvoltarea afacerilor. Biroul Străin & al Republicii Engleze, aparținând guvernului britanic, administrează Fondul pentru Oportunități Globale (GOF), din care sunt finanțate o serie pe proiecte și în România. CUE și Confederația Camerelor de Comerț din West Midlands (CWMCC) au formulat împreună un astfel de proiect, înaintând propunerea către GOF, cu titlul: "Construirea capacităților în cadrul organizațiilor de sprijin al afacerilor din zona Sud-Muntenia pentru dezvoltarea durabilă a întreprinderilor mici și mijlocii". În cadrul proiectului s-a derulat o serie de workshop-uri în cadrul Universității Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești, în colaborare cu Camera de Comerț Prahova.